

**Department of Commerce
Occupational Safety and Health Program
Report**



May 2005

**Department of Commerce
Office of Occupational Safety and Health
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Room 5111
Washington, DC 20230**

Telephone (202) 482-4935

Executive Summary

The monthly Occupational Safety and Health report provides leaders and managers with an overview of the effectiveness of the Department's Occupational Safety and Health program. The report is based on the latest available data for the Department derived from employee compensation claims and provides control measures to reduce the potential for injuries and illnesses. Wellness information is also included.

The frequency of accidents continues a downward trend and is now less than 1.5 accidents per 100 employees. The monthly rates from May 2004 through April 2005 continue to fluctuate between 1 and 2 accidents per 100 employees. The cost of accidents is still forecast to be in the upper \$14M range.

The department did not meet the SHARE goal to reduce lost production days for Fiscal Year 2004 and won't meet it in Fiscal Year 2005 without significant work. This goal includes the cost of continuation of pay, which has increased in Fiscal Year 2005.

Based on the information in the report the following recommendations are made to reduce the injuries, illnesses, and associated costs. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will publicize these recommendations and work with bureau safety offices to implement them, where possible.

Supervisors should go to the Department of Labor Office of Workers' Compensation Program website and take one or more of the short on-line courses to learn about this program.

Employees who operate Department motor vehicles should go to the Department Learning Management System and complete the on-line course for motor vehicle accident prevention.

Employees or supervisors should contact the Department's Office of Occupational Safety and Health to obtain a copy of the booklet "Slips, Trips, and Falls".

The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will develop a training aid for Area Safety Representatives to help them identify tripping hazards. This office will also provide recommendations for coefficients of friction for floor wax to facility managers to reduce the potential for slips.

Supervisors should approve continuation of employee pay only when it is authorized. If authorization is denied, the supervisor should change the continuation of pay to sick or annual leave.

Increase the use of light duty return-to-work positions, where feasible, to get employees back into the work force

May Report

Purpose. Provide managers and leaders within the Department of Commerce with information about the effectiveness of the Department's Occupational Safety and Health program. This report is based on the latest available accident data for the Department derived from employee compensation claims. Wellness information is also provided to assist employees in preparing for summer hazards. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will publicize the hazards and recommendations in this report using the Department's web page. They will also work with bureau safety offices to further analyze the data and implement recommendations as appropriate for each bureau.

Discussion. There is no significant change in the frequency of accidents, see figure 1. At the end of Fiscal Year 2005 the rate should be between 1.9 and 2.1. This will put the Department at or just above the previous seven year average. Fiscal Years 1998 and 1999 were added to this months report to expand the scope for comparison. The Total Case Incident Rate for April of Fiscal Year 2005 is 1.44 incidents per 100 employees and is slightly lower than the rate for March of Fiscal Year 2005. The rates from the last 12 months as shown in figure 2 continue to fluctuate between 1 and 2 accidents per 100 workers.

Figure 1. Total Case Incident Rate Trend.

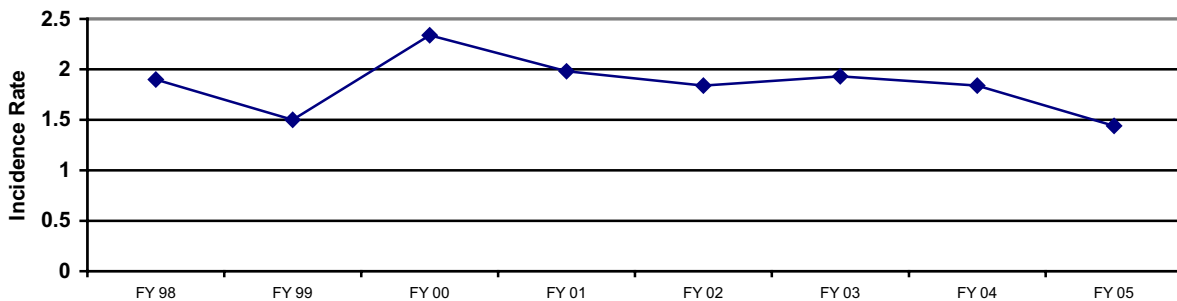
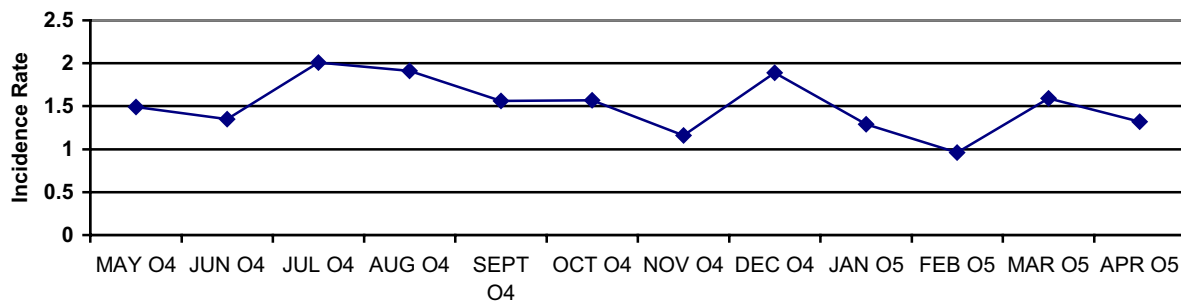
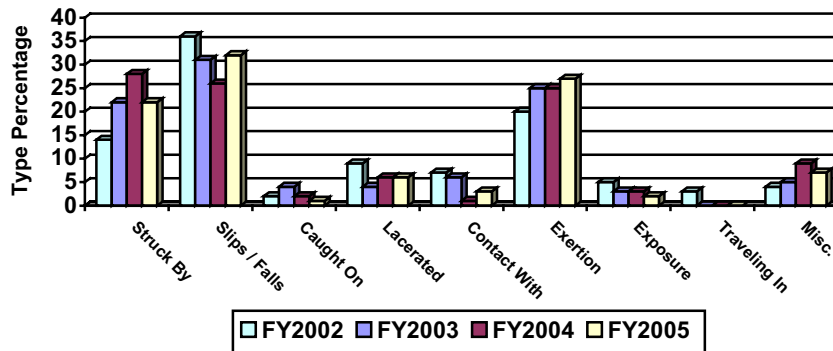


Figure 2. Monthly Total Case Incident Rate Trend



The chart in figure 3 shows virtually no change in the types of accidents that occurred from Fiscal Year 2002 through Fiscal Year 2005. The three main accident types that account for most of the accidents are slips and falls, struck by, and exertion.

Figure 3. Accidents by type for Fiscal Year 2005.



The predominate cause for slips and falls is uneven walking surfaces.

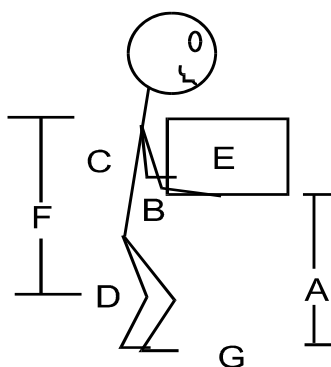
The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will develop a training aid for Area Safety Representatives to help them identify hazardous uneven walking surfaces. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will provide building managers with recommendations for coefficients of friction for floor wax to reduce the potential for slips.

Supervisors or employees wanting to know more about preventing slips and falls can request a booklet “Slips, Trips, and Falls” by calling the Office of Occupational Safety and Health at (202) 482-4937 or e-mail to ffanning@doc.gov.

The Department’s Learning Management System has a short course in motor vehicle accident prevention that employees may use to learn the causes and control measures to prevent accidents. Employees can go to the website <http://e-learning.doc.gov/> for information or to register.

Lifting and moving objects in the workplace caused many of the exertion injuries. Figure 4 outlines the basic knowledge of proper lifting.

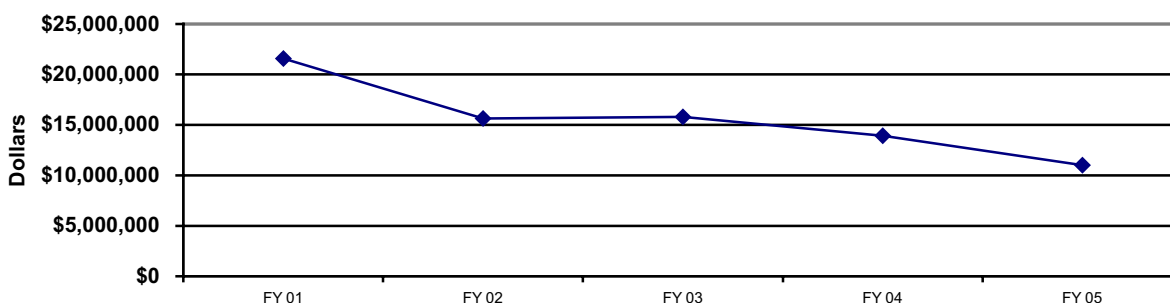
Figure 4. Proper lifting Techniques, borrowed with permission from Basic Safety Administration: A Handbook for the New Safety Specialist, American Society of Safety Engineers, 1998, 2003.



A-Only lift the box as high as you have to. Use a table, roller device, or lifting device when necessary.
B-Keep the box as close to your body as possible. The farther the box is away the more strain and pressure it may put on your back.
C-Keep your back as straight as you can.
D-Lift with your legs not with your back.
E-Do not lift heavy objects. In most cases 35 pounds is more than enough to lift. But the weight really depends on the amount of times you lift the object. Try to have a hand hold on the object to make the lift easier and safer.
F-Try to pick up objects between your knee and shoulders and try not to lift objects over your shoulders.
G-Do not pick up the object from the floor. Even a few inches off the floor is an improvement.

When an employee is off work from an occupational injury or illness he or she receives compensation from the Department of Labor's Office of Workers' Compensation Program. The cost for that claim is then charged back to the particular agency employing the injured worker. In the Department of Commerce those costs are charged back to the bureau where the injured employee works. Figure 5 shows the costs paid by the Department of Commerce from Fiscal Year 2001 through the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2005. The large costs in 2001 were due in part to the Decennial Census.

Figure 5. Costs paid by Department of Labor to Department of Commerce Employees (based on Department of Labor Fiscal Year, July 1 – June, 30).



A major program element of the Workers' Compensation Program is to return employees who have been injured or ill to the work place as quickly as possible. Through cooperative work among the employee, the employee's doctor, and the supervisor the employee may be able to return to a light duty position while still recovering from the injury. By returning an employee to work in a light duty position the employee is encouraged to improve their health, supervisors retain more regular contact with employees, and the employee does not lose his or her connection with the workplace. The longer an employee stays out on compensation the more it costs the agency with no return on that cost.

To assist supervisors and managers the Department of Labor's Office of Workers' Compensation has a website, <http://www.dol-esa.gov/share/ppt/ppt.htm>, with training that is free. The web site offers the following training that is appropriate for our Department needs:

- Central Bill Pay & Medical Authorization.
- Front-Line Supervisors.
- Nurse Intervention.
- Returning Injured Employees to Work.
- Injury Compensation Specialists Training.

The more supervisors and managers know about Workers' Compensation the more reductions can be made to the \$14.4M expense that is forecast for Fiscal Year 2005.

Department of Labor Initiative. The Department continues to meet three of the four SHARE goals for Fiscal Year 2005. To meet the fourth area the Department must reduce its lost production time. This can be done by better managing the COP program and better utilization of light duty assignments.

Health and Wellness. The focus for health and wellness over the next 30 days should be on the hazards of preventing cancer and healthy food preparation.

Preventing Cancer.

Health Impact. What you eat, drink, where you work, and how you live are factors that can affect your risk of cancer.

Control. The American Cancer Society recommends eating a variety of healthful foods, adopting a physically active lifestyle, maintaining a healthful weight, and maintaining a healthful lifestyle.

- Eat a variety of healthful foods. This includes five or more servings of a variety of vegetables and fruits each day, limit consumption of red meats, choose foods that maintain a healthful weight, and limit the amount of refined carbohydrates.
- Adopt a physically active lifestyle. Be at least moderately active for 30 minutes or more five days a week; 45 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous activity four or more days a week is even better.
- Maintain a healthful weight throughout life. Balance caloric intake with physical activity. Lose weight if currently overweight or obese.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle by quitting smoking and protecting yourself from the sun.

Healthy Food Preparation.

Health Impact. Food that spoils can cause a number of illnesses. This is called food poisoning or food borne illness. Many people who think they have the "flu" or a "stomach bug," are really suffering the effects of a food borne illness. Germs can get on poorly stored or prepared foods and grow. The germs cannot be seen and often cannot be smelled or tasted. Foods that are likely to have germs that can cause food poisoning include: unpasteurized or untreated juices, sprouts, raw eggs and foods that contain raw eggs

Control.

- When shopping buy cans and jars that look perfect without dents, cracks, or loose lids. Eggs should only be purchased at stores that refrigerate them. Open egg cartons and check the eggs. Don't buy eggs that are broken or cracked. Prevent raw meat, poultry, and seafood packages from dripping juices onto other food. Pick up cold foods last to

help them stay cold until they are placed in the home refrigerator. Also pick up hot foods last so they will still be warm when eaten at home.

- After shopping put food into the refrigerator or freezer right away. Kitchens must be kept clean and hands should be washed for at least 20 seconds before and after touching food. Wash everything else before and after it touches food. Clean all fresh fruits and vegetables before using. Keep meat, poultry, and seafood cold while they thaw and cook them until they are done. Use a meat thermometer for poultry and meat, if possible. Dig a fork into cooked fish. The fish should flake.

Future health and wellness topics will include:

- **June 2005** – preventing and controlling diabetes and burns from fireworks
- **July 2005** – preventing sunburn and obesity
- **August 2005** – preventing rape and successful smoking cessation
- **September 2005** – health affects of Hypothermia and preventing colds and flu
- **October 2005** – Carbon Monoxide poisoning and heart attacks from snow removal